

Senate State, Veterans, & Military Affairs

04/13/2023 01:30 PM

SB23-211 Federal Indian Child Welfare Act Of 1978

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Shannon Alcott For themselves	<p>I am here to support Bill 23-211 to put protections into place for our Native and Indigenous children.</p> <p>When i was 16 years old I met another Lakota girl from my reservation at a camp that taught us about the importance of land preservation. This girl lived 30 mins away from me but I had never met her at ceremony or powwows that my family and I were frequently part of. We quickly became friends and were even called sisters because we looked and acted alike. I learned that she was adopted by an Irish Catholic Family when she was 5 or 6 and she was never exposed to her culture. I also learned that while she was with this family, she was sexually abused by her foster brother when she was 8 and this continued till she was 13 and started to fight back. They quickly painted her as a problem child because of her heritage . She had a hard time and struggled with school, with drugs and with suicide despite having a family that believed they had all the best intentions for her. I think about how similar we were but how my connection to my culture changed my course in life. Her story like many others shows how important it is to keep these kids within their communities and not in homes where they are alienated and demonized. We need to put these protections in place for our future generations. This is why myself and other community members urge you to support this bill, thank you.</p>

BLACKWOOD

Yá'át'ééh shik'ei dóó shidine'é.

Ceriss yinishyé.

Ignacio déé' naashá.

Máyk! Nñay nñia Tñi'achī Sñmaynichī, nñay nia Ceriss. Nñ' Pinuváa Kanighetñ.

Hola, me llamo Ceriss. Soy de Ignacio.

Greetings,

My name is Ceriss (sure-ree-se) Blackwood. I am a Triethnic Indigenous Chicana from Ignacio, Colorado. As a child, I went into the Colorado Foster Care system and was a ward of the Court until my 18th birthday. I was in La Plata County, Colorado.

Many of my Native peers were placed in non-Native homes. They became addicted to drugs, and did not graduate high school. They often complained to me at our County Independent Living classes, that they felt lost, disconnected and as if their life did not matter- because of their non-Native foster parents. I have seen many of them go to jail, prison or pass away over the years.

I was fortunate enough to be placed in a Southern Ute & Picuris Pueblo home. This allowed me to flourish, as I had access to ceremonies, culture and language. I was steered toward college and my foster family supported and embraced me. After I graduated high school (against all odds) I went on to earn at B.S. and M.A. from Colorado State University utilizing the Colorado ETV program. I came back to Ignacio and now teach at the Tribal school. Having a Foster Family with my background gave me purpose and direction. I did not struggle with addiction or incarceration, and thrived.

Please know, that ICWA makes a huge difference in Indigenous communities. It gives us changes and connections, that non-Native homes do not. ICWA allows us to be ourselves and become productive citizens that give back. Taking away ICWA will cause more harm to Tribal foster children, and ensure uncertain pathways to incarnation, suicide, homelessness and drug use. Be the positive change for us to succeed, not the ultimate obstacle.

Sincerely, Ceriss Blackwood (April 2023)



illuminate
Building Brighter Childhoods

Members of the Senate State, Veterans, & Military Affairs Committee,

My name is Jillian Fabricius, and I am Deputy Director with Illuminate Colorado, a statewide nonprofit working to strengthen families, organizations, and communities to prevent child maltreatment. I am submitting written testimony **to ask you for a 'yes' vote on SB23-211 Federal Indian Child Welfare Act Of 1978.**

By preserving the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA) in state law, we strengthen indigenous families, tribes, and communities.

Illuminate supports SB23-211 for two reasons:

1. **Children and families experience increased positive outcomes when children are placed with kin.** Research shows children placed with kin experience increased emotional wellbeing, higher sense of self esteem, and a stronger understanding of cultural and self identity than children placed in non-kin settings.¹ Kin who serve as caregivers for children removed from home experience a stronger feeling of bondedness and responsibility to children than non-kin caregivers. This bill would adopt ICWA to state law, preserving provisions that promote placement with kin and positive outcomes for indigenous children and families.
2. **The Indian Child Welfare Act has a strong history of protecting indigenous children and empowering tribes in cases of child maltreatment.** For nearly 45 years, ICWA has guided states in court custody proceedings for child abuse, neglect, and adoption to act in the best interests of indigenous children and promote the stability and security of tribes.² After a long history of family separation and the disenfranchisement of indigenous tribes' ability to address child maltreatment, ICWA established processes for states and tribes to partner to ensure indigenous children receive culturally responsive and trauma-informed placement plans. This bill would maintain these processes and continue ICWA's history of protecting indigenous children and empowering tribes in cases of child maltreatment.

We also support an amendment that will be offered to add an implementation date to strengthen the bill. In closing, when indigenous children involved in the child welfare system have the opportunity to remain with their families and tribes, we build the foundation for children, families, and communities to thrive. **We urge you to support adopting the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 to state law by voting 'yes' on SB23-211.**

Sincerely,

Jillian Adams Fabricius, Deputy Director

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¹ Alia Innovations. (2019). Evidence base for avoiding family separation in child welfare practice. Retrieved From: <https://www.aliainnovations.org/research-brief>

² Prevent Child Abuse America. (2022). Indian child welfare act: Background and status. Retrieved From: <https://preventchildabuse.org/resources/indian-child-welfare-act/>